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University Studies 2008-2009 Assessment Report

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

During the 2008-2009 academic year, the University Studies program continued to use existing survey instruments to conduct assessment at the Freshman, Sophomore and Senior levels. Prior Learning, Early-, Mid- and End-of-year Surveys were administered in the year-long Freshman Inquiry courses. End-of-term evaluations were administered in Sophomore Inquiry courses and Capstone Student Experience surveys were administered in Capstone courses. An ad hoc survey was conducted to determine students' experiences with their Cluster courses. Student focus groups and qualitative comments were used to supplement the Cluster and Capstone surveys. Student learning related to University Studies goals was directly assessed through student portfolios at the Freshman-level and course portfolios at the Capstone level.

From student responses to the End-of-year, End-of-term and Capstone Student Experience surveys it is clear that University Studies goals are being addressed at all levels of the program. Across all of the surveys, students were asked whether they had opportunities to engage in learning related to University Studies goals. On all two items, FRINQ, SINQ and Capstone students' average agreement rating was 3.85 or higher on a 5-point agreement scale (4 = Agree 5 = Strongly agree). FRINQ students were least likely to agree that they had opportunities to develop skills expressing themselves orally or opportunities to learn how to find and use resources to solve problems, the same two lowest scoring items as last year. SINQ students were least likely to agree that they had opportunities to develop skills expressing themselves orally, however that item has improved over the last two years. FRINQ and SINQ students agreed that their faculty showed a personal interest in their learning and used a variety of methods to evaluate their performance. Additionally, students agreed that SINQ faculty created an atmosphere that encouraged active student participation.

At the FRINQ level, student portfolios were reviewed using the Diversity of Human Experience, Writing and Quantitative Literacy rubrics. The portfolio review suggests that students' learning related to diversity has improved consistently over the last three administrations (2005, 2007, 2009), students learning related to writing has remained consistent, improving slightly between 2007 and 2009, and that student learning related to quantitative literacy has declined between 2007 and 2009. In addition to the rubrics, student portfolios were also evaluated using a checklist for each rubric to reflect the types of student work included in the portfolio. Two years ago, very few students included copies of multiple drafts of writing assignments or assignment instructions. After changing the portfolio assignment to more clearly request those pieces, a much larger number of portfolios included them. This year, the end of year survey in FRINQ included questions about the portfolio process. Most students reported that they had begun the portfolio process during winter term, that they had opportunities to make multiple revisions to their portfolios and get feedback from mentors and faculty. Fewer than half of the respondents reported that they had shared their portfolios with classmates to get feedback. Students generally agreed that the portfolio process helped them learn about the UNST goals, but were less likely to agree that the process helped them understand connections among topics in the course or better understand themselves as learners.

At the SINQ level, there was no additional assessment beyond student surveys. This year, the focus for the middle of the program has been working toward the revision of the SINQ/Cluster sequence. To inform that process, we gathered information on student experiences of their Cluster courses through a survey and student focus groups. More than 60% of the respondents to the survey indicated that they were satisfied with their Cluster experience, but students also reported problems related to too few courses being offered in Clusters or finding courses that fit their schedules. These problems were echoed by the students in the focus groups. Those students also mentioned that their Cluster courses were somewhat unpredictable when it came to workload (sometimes too much, sometimes too little). Transfer students expressed difficulty finding the information they needed to register for appropriate Cluster courses. Despite these problems, students in the focus groups liked that they had to take courses outside of their discipline and enjoyed meeting a broader range of students than they would if they only took major courses. As the Clusters are

redesigned, students' need for flexibility in scheduling and for complete and accurate information will be addressed.

Two qualitative assessment projects were conducted by the Capstone program this year and the Capstone course portfolio was launched as a tool for assessing student learning at this level. A review of student comments from early term assessment revealed that faculty expertise, their experience in the community, classroom discussions and course structure were helping them learn. At the end of the term, students indicated that they had gained insight about being involved in their communities, had a deeper understanding of social issues, recognized connections between the classroom and "real life", and gained insight about diverse populations. When asked for suggested changes for the course, almost all students said, "nothing." Students who had suggestions focused on course design and scheduling.

Several attempts to assess individual student work samples from Capstones resulted in data that were not useful for evaluating student learning. This year, we developed a course portfolio including a course syllabus, a course assignment, student work samples and a faculty reflection. We used these materials to assess student learning in Capstones related to diversity. Faculty reviewers evaluated the course portfolios and the results indicate that in most Capstone courses students have opportunities to learn and demonstrate their learning related to diversity. The review also revealed areas for further work and possible arenas for faculty development around diversity. The course portfolio process is being modified slightly for next year, but this process comes closest to demonstrating the student learning experience in the Capstone course. In the coming year, we will work on expanding participation in the course portfolio project and on assessing other UNST goals.

Finally, the 2008-2009 academic year was the first year during which University Studies employed a Retention Associate. This year was spent creating programs that support students' needs related to academic preparation, financial and physical well being as well as social connectedness. These programs focused on early identification of students at risk, ongoing communication and quick intervention. University Studies has worked closely with academic departments and advising and student services offices to promote and implement these efforts. Student feedback about these initiatives was gathered through surveys and informal conversations. The Retention Associate and Assessment Coordinator are working together to decide on the evaluation plan for these initiatives in the future.

FRESHMAN INQUIRY ASSESSMENT

TOOLS AND METHODS

Prior Learning Survey

Purpose: The Prior Learning Survey asked about students' academic experiences prior to attending PSU, reasons for and concerns about attending college, and early college experiences and plans. The survey results provide information to individual faculty about their students and to the program about the overall preparation and needs of the incoming freshman class.

Method: During the first two weeks of Fall 2008, Freshman Inquiry students completed a Prior Learning Assessment. This on-line survey was administered during FRINQ mentor sessions. 1367 students completed the survey for an 82% response rate.

FRINQ End-of-year Survey

Purpose: The FRINQ End-of-year Survey asked students to rate their experiences in their FRINQ course over the 2008-2009 academic year. Students responded to questions about the course format, faculty pedagogical practices, and mentor contribution to the course. The survey also asked about experiences with advising, comfort on campus and plans for the fall term. The results provide information to individual faculty about their course and to the program about students' overall experience in FRINQ. This year,

questions were added that asked students about their experiences assembling and constructing their ePortfolio.

Method: During the final three weeks of Spring term 2009, FRINQ students completed the End-of-year survey. This on-line survey was administered during mentor sessions. 842 students responded to the survey for a response rate of 69.6%.

FRINQ Portfolio Review

Purpose: The FRINQ Portfolio Review process scores student portfolios against rubrics developed to measure student learning related to University Studies goals. The results provide information to faculty teams about student learning in FRINQ themes and to students' overall learning in FRINQ.

Method: Over the course of FRINQ courses, students develop portfolios representing their work and reflection relating to the four University Studies goals. During Spring 2009, students were asked for permission to evaluate their portfolios as part of program assessment for University Studies. 819 (67.7%) students returned consent forms and 608 (75.4%) of those returning forms gave consent. Of these, 210 student portfolios were randomly selected for review representing 30 portfolios for each of the seven FRINQ themes. When electronic portfolios with bad URLs were excluded, we ended up reviewing 198 portfolios. This year, the portfolio review process focused on the Writing, Quantitative Literacy and Diversity goals. Each goal was assessed using a 6-point rubric, where 6 is a score expected of a graduating senior. In addition to using the rubrics, each portfolio was assessed against a checklist developed to provide information about the types of assignments included in student portfolios. Inter-rater reliability for the rubrics were: Writing, 89%; Quantitative Literacy, 91%; and Diversity, 70%.

ASSESSMENT DATA

FRINQ End-of-year Survey

In the FRINQ course students had the opportunity to...

Ratings made on a scale of 1=Strongly disagree to 5=Strongly Agree.

	04-05		06-07		07-08		08-09	
			Mean	Std. Deviation	Mean	Std. Deviation	Mean	Std. Deviation
Apply course material to improve critical thinking	4.1		3.95	0.870	4.05	.892	4.02	0.85
Acquire skills in working with others as a member of a team	4.1		4.01	0.873	4.07	.87	4.05	0.84
Explore issues of diversity such as race; class; gender; sexual orientation; ethnicity	4.2		4.11	0.896	4.13	.91	4.11	0.91
Develop skills in expressing myself	3.9		3.74	0.951	3.86	.94	3.86	0.90

orally.								
Develop skills in expressing myself in writing	4.1		3.98	0.890	4.08	.91	4.04	0.88
Learn how to find and use resources for answering or solving problems	3.9		3.81	0.910	3.93	.89	3.89	0.87
Learn to analyze and critically evaluate ideas; arguments and multiple points of view	4.1		3.97	0.882	4.08	.91	4.05	0.85
Explore ethical issues	4.2		4.04	0.892	4.09	.98	4.07	0.90

The FRINQ Faculty...

Ratings made on a scale of 1=Strongly disagree to 5=Strongly Agree.

	04-05		06-07		07-08		08-09	
			Mean	Std. Deviation	Mean	Std. Deviation	Mean	Std. Deviation
Displayed a personal interest in students and their learning	4.2		4.01	0.985	4.09	.98	4.07	0.95
Scheduled course work (class activities; tests; projects) in ways which encouraged students to stay up to date in their work.	3.9		3.63	1.123	3.83	1.01	3.78	1.06
Formed "teams" or "discussion groups" to facilitate learning.	4.1		3.91	0.970	4.05	.90	4.04	0.91
Made it clear how each topic fit into the course.	3.8		3.55	1.138	3.69	1.12	3.75	1.08
Explained course material clearly and concisely.	3.7		3.51	1.176	3.65	1.13	3.72	1.02
Related course material to real life situations	4.0		3.78	1.044	3.90	1.03	3.93	0.96
Inspired students to set and achieve goals which really challenged them.	3.8		3.50	1.071	3.69	1.09	3.69	1.04
Asked students to share ideas and experiences with others whose backgrounds and viewpoints differ from their own.	4.1		3.90	1.004	4.01	.99	3.98	0.97
Provided timely and frequent feedback on test; reports; projects; etc. to help students improve.	3.8		3.71	1.061	3.86	1.05	3.68	1.16
Encouraged student-faculty interaction outside of class (office visits; phone calls; e-mail; etc.)	4.0		3.82	0.976	3.91	1.01	3.79	1.03
Used a variety of methods-papers; presentations; class projects; exams; etc.- to evaluate student progress.	4.2		3.98	0.941	4.09	.93	4.06	0.93

In the FRINQ course students had the opportunity to...

Ratings made on a scale of 1=Strongly disagree to 5=Strongly Agree.

**In courses with high agreement 75-100% of students agreed or strongly agreed with the statement. Moderate agreement*

	2004-2005		2006-2007		2007-2008		2008-2009	
	Moderate Agreement*	High Agreement*	Moderate Agreement*	High Agreement*	Moderate Agreement*	High Agreement*	Moderate Agreement*	High Agreement*
Apply course material to improve critical thinking	26.7	70.0	26.5	70.6	18.9	78.4	23.3	74.4
Acquire skills in working with others as a member of a team	20.0	80.0	35.3	61.8	24.3	75.7	25.6	69.8
Explore issues of diversity such as race; class; gender; sexual orientation; ethnicity	13.3	80.0	14.7	79.4	29.7	67.6	25.6	69.8
Develop skills in expressing myself orally.	40.0	50.0	55.9	29.4	48.6	48.6	34.9	51.2
Develop skills in expressing myself in writing	30.0	66.7	47.1	52.9	21.6	75.7	23.3	72.1
Learn how to find and use resources for answering or solving problems	43.3	53.3	58.8	41.2	40.5	56.8	34.9	58.1
Learn to analyze and critically evaluate ideas; arguments and multiple points of view	23.3	73.3	32.4	64.7	18.9	78.4	18.6	76.7
Explore ethical issues	13.3	83.3	32.4	64.7	24.3	73.0	30.2	67.4

represents 50-74% of students and low agreement indicates that less than half of students agreed with the statement.

	2004-2005	2006-2007	2007-2008	2008-2009
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	Moderate Agreement* t*	High Agreement* nt*	Moderate Agreement* t*	High Agreement* nt*	Moderate Agreement* t*	High Agreement* nt*	Moderate Agreement* t*	High Agreement* nt*
Displayed a personal interest in students and their learning	16.7	76.7	29.4	61.8	27.0	67.6	23.3	69.8
Scheduled course work (class activities; tests; projects) in ways which encouraged students to stay up to date in their work.	30.0	46.7	32.4	38.2	56.8	35.1	32.6	48.8
Formed "teams" or "discussion groups" to facilitate learning.	26.7	66.7	23.5	61.8	29.7	67.6	30.2	62.8
Made it clear how each topic fit into the course.	30.0	50.0	33.3	36.4	51.4	35.1	39.5	46.5
Explained course material clearly and concisely.	36.7	36.7	33.3	36.4	54.1	35.1	44.2	37.2
Related course material to real life situations	26.7	63.3	24.2	51.5	43.2	45.9	37.2	55.8
Inspired students to set and achieve goals which really challenged them.	36.7	36.7	30.3	27.3	32.4	40.5	39.5	34.9
Asked students to share ideas and experiences with others whose backgrounds and viewpoints differ from their own.	23.3	70.0	27.3	57.6	18.9	75.7	34.9	55.8
Provided timely and frequent feedback on test; reports; projects; etc. to help students improve.	36.7	43.3	36.4	42.4	27.0	59.5	44.2	44.2
Encouraged student-faculty interaction outside of class (office visits;	40.0	50.0	48.5	39.4	32.4	54.1	34.9	44.2

phone calls; e-mail; etc.)								
Used a variety of methods-papers; presentations; class projects; exams; etc.- to evaluate student progress.	23.3	73.3	39.4	57.6	16.2	81.1	23.3	69.8

**In courses with high agreement 75-100% of students agreed or strongly agreed with the statement. Moderate agreement represents 50-74% of students and low agreement indicates that less than half of students agreed with the statement.*

Student responses to portfolio survey questions

Percent of students reporting that they did during fall, winter or spring terms to prepare for their ePortfolios.

	Fall	Winter	Spring
Collect course assignments	64.7	73.6	78.9
Assemble a paper portfolio	30.8	32.5	30.2
Mindmap/brainstorming	36.5	43.3	42.0
Journal/freewrite/written reflection/blog	45.5	59.2	59.9
Formal reflective assignment	47.9	56.6	81.0
Create a website	29.7	57.2	74.9

Percent of students reporting that they did the following activities any time during the year to prepare for their ePortfolios.

	%
Met with faculty to get feedback	26.3
Received feedback from faculty or mentor	66.6
Revised or created multiple versions over time	63.8
Shared portfolio with classmates to get feedback	44.8

FRINQ Portfolio Review

Mean Portfolio Scores

	Academic Year							
	2002-2003		2004-2005		2006-2007		2008-2009	
	Mean	SD	Mean	SD	Mean	SD	Mean	SD
<i>University Studies Goal</i>								
Writing	3.40	0.71	3.55	0.80	3.28*	0.87	3.57	0.91
Quantitative Literacy**					2.33	0.81	2.26	0.84
Diversity	2.48	0.80	2.03	0.79	2.39*	0.94	2.56	1.10

* Mean score is significantly different than 2004-2005, $p < .05$

** Comparison with previous years are not appropriate because the QL rubric was adjusted during 2007. The changes contribute to a more comprehensive rubric, but they do not allow for comparison across years.

Percentage of portfolios that included:

	2006-2007		2008-2009	
	<i>N</i>	<i>Percent</i>	<i>N</i>	<i>Percent</i>
<i>Evidence Related to Writing:</i>				
Personal Narrative	177	87.2	155	77.5
Analytical Writing	179	88.2	157	78.5
Creative Writing	62	30.5	60	30
Reflection on the Writing Process	120	59.1	104	52
Assignment Instructions	39	19.2	86	43
Outside References Integrated into Writing	155	76.4	118	59
Evidence of a First Draft	17	8.4	54	27
In text citations	89	43.8	52	26
Appropriate use of grammar throughout	153	75.4	135	67.5
<i>Evidence Related to Quantitative Literacy:</i>				
Data represented in charts and graphs	142	70.0	72	36
Narrative describing quantitative data	121	59.6	126	63
Evaluation of quantitative data	46	22.7	37	18.5
Use of the term mean	27	13.3	29	14.5
Use of the term median	8	3.9	6	3
Use of the term mode	2	1.0	2	1
Use of the term standard deviation	9	4.4	11	5.5
Use of the term statistical significance	15	7.4	17	8.5
Use of the term correlation	17	8.4	17	8.5
<i>Evidence Related to Diversity</i>				
Personal definition of diversity	109	53.7	94	47
Reference to multiple facets of diversity	115	56.7	122	61
Personal narrative related to diversity	107	52.7	109	54.7
Reflection related to diversity	133	65.5	145	72.5
Outside scholarship related to diversity	109	53.7	107	53.5

FINDINGS

FRINQ End-of-year Survey

Course Evaluation

- In general, students agreed that they had the opportunities to address all four of the University Studies goals in their FRINQ courses. Means on these items ranged from 3.74 to 4.11 on a 5-point agreement scale. When looking at the percentage of students that agreed or strongly agreed with those items, over two-thirds of students agreed or strongly agreed with each item. For all items, mean scores remained stable from the 07-08 to the 08-09 school year.

- Students also generally agreed with statements about their faculty members' teaching practices. All items had means above 3.0 on a 5-point scale. Students were most likely to agree that faculty expressed a personal interest in their learning ($M = 4.07$) and used a variety of methods to evaluate student progress ($M = 4.06$).

Student Portfolios

- Related to student portfolios, most students reported beginning to work on portfolios during Winter term (41%), with about one-third (36%) beginning the process in the fall, and 22% beginning the process during Spring term.
- 75% of students reported using Google Sites to construct their ePortfolios.
- When asked about how strongly they agreed with statements about the portfolio process, students reported the strongest agreement with the statement that "creating my portfolio helped me understand the University Studies goals" (51%). Students were less likely to agree or strongly agree that creating the portfolio had helped them "understand connections among topics in the course" (39%) or "understand themselves as learners" (35%).

FRINQ Portfolio Review

Rubric

- Over the last four reviews, the mean Writing score was consistently between 3.25 and 3.6 on a 6-point scale. Mean Quantitative Literacy score remained below 2.5 over two administrations. The mean Diversity score has shown the most variability over time but has ranged between 2 and three over the last four reviews.

Checklist

- Approximately 80% of students included evidence of personal narrative and included analytical writing in their portfolios. 10% fewer students included these types of evidence in their portfolios this year as compared to 2007. In 2007, students generally did not include evidence of a first draft of their writing (8.4%), or assignment instructions (19.2%) because those were not required elements of student portfolios. Since changing the portfolio requirements, many more students are now including first drafts (27.0%) and assignment instructions (43%).
- A key question related to the Quantitative Literacy checklist was how many QL assignments students included in their portfolios. The mean number of assignments was 1.31, indicating that most students included one or two assignments in their portfolio. In fact, 36% included one assignment and 23% included two assignments. Another 20% included no assignments related to Quantitative Literacy. When reviewing the assignments that were included in portfolios, students were most likely to have included a narrative description of quantitative data (63%). Compared to 2007, many fewer students represented data using charts and graphs (70% in 2007 and 36% in 2009). Students were less likely to have included an evaluation of quantitative data used by others (22.7%).
- Over half of the student portfolios reviewed included evidence related to diversity including reflection related to diversity (72%), reference to multiple facets of diversity (61%).

REFLECTION

The findings evidence several things. First, the End-of-year Survey data concerning student learning opportunities and faculty performance are reasonably consistent over the past four years for most of the items queried. Second, the percentage rendering of Survey data allow us to identify those areas where more work needs to be done to increase the "High Agreement" percentage: for example, oral presentation skills, finding and using resources, scheduling of course work, clarity with respect to topic integration, inspiring students to set and achieve challenging goals, timely feedback, and student-faculty interaction outside of class. Third, greater attention needs to be paid to developing quantitative literacy; year after year the data

indicate that too little is being done. These data will be reported to the Freshman Inquiry faculty in mid-September, 2009 in advance of fall term courses, along with suggestions as how we might improve those areas where scores are low.

SOPHOMORE INQUIRY ASSESSMENT

TOOLS AND METHODS

SINQ End-of-term Survey

Purpose: The SINQ End-of-term Survey asked students to rate their experiences in their SINQ course. Students responded to questions about the course format, faculty pedagogical practices, and mentor contribution to the course. The results provide information to individual faculty about their course and to the program about students' overall experience in SINQ.

Method: During the final three weeks of each term during the 2008-2009 academic year, SINQ students completed the End-of-term survey. This on-line survey was administered during mentor sessions. 2896 students responded to the survey.

ASSESSMENT DATA

The Sophomore Inquiry *Learning Experience*

Ratings made on a scale of 1=Strongly disagree to 5=Strongly Agree.

	06-07		07-08		08-09	
	Mean	Std. Dev	Mean	Std. Dev	Mean	Std. Dev
The course provided opportunities to learn to analyze and critically evaluate ideas, arguments and multiple points of view	4.03	0.950	4.15	.93	4.12	0.90
The course provided opportunities to develop skills in working with others as a member of a team	3.90	0.970	3.87	1.04	3.97*	0.92
The course provided opportunities to explore issues of diversity such as race; class; gender; sexual orientation; ethnicity	3.95	1.075	3.95	1.08	3.93	1.05
The course provided opportunities to develop skills in expressing myself orally.	3.73	1.005	3.84*	1.03	3.89*	0.98
The course provided opportunities to develop skills in expressing myself in writing.	3.93	0.964	4.02*	.97	4.03	0.94
The course provided opportunities to explore	4.01	1.000	4.06	.98	3.98*	0.97

ethical issues and dilemmas						
It was clear how the work from the mentor session connected to the overall course.	3.85	1.11	3.83	1.12	3.93*	1.04
I understand how this course fits into my PSU general education requirements			3.79	1.17	3.74	1.16
Overall, I was satisfied with my experience in this class.			3.88	1.13	3.82	1.10

* score differs significantly from the previous year, $p < .05$

The SINQ Faculty...

Ratings made on a scale of 1=Strongly disagree to 5=Strongly Agree.

	06-07		07-08		08-09	
	Mean	Std. Dev	Mean	Std. Dev	Mean	Std. Dev
Displayed a personal interest in students and their learning	4.13	.965	3.99*	1.01	3.98	0.98
Scheduled course work (class activities; tests; projects) in ways which encouraged students to stay up to date in their work.	3.92	1.057	3.95	1.03	3.93	1.023
Provided timely and frequent feedback on test; reports; projects; etc. to help students improve.	3.75	1.100	3.79	1.11	3.85*	1.076
Used a variety of methods-papers; presentations; class projects; exams; etc.- to evaluate student progress.	3.98	0.990	3.89*	1.04	3.95*	0.96
Clearly stated the learning objectives for the overall course	n/a		3.95	1.03	3.92	1.03
Clearly stated the criteria for grading	n/a		3.81	1.12	3.85	1.08
Created an atmosphere that encouraged active student participation.	n/a		4.08	1.03	4.04	1.00

Used activities and assignments that allowed me to feel personally engaged in my learning.	n/a		3.93	1.05	3.89	1.05
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* 07-08 score differs significantly from the 06-07 score, $p < .05$

Percentage of SING courses where students agreed or strongly agreed that...

	2006-2007 N=93		2007-2008 N=130		2008-2009 N=133	
	Moderate Agreement*	High Agreement*	Moderate Agreement*	High Agreement*	Moderate Agreement*	High Agreement*
The course provided opportunities to learn to analyze and critically evaluate ideas, arguments and multiple points of view	21.5	71.0	16.2	77.7	21.8	74.4
The course provided opportunities to develop skills in working with others as a member of a team	26.9	58.1	17.7	59.2	20.3	70.7
The course provided opportunities to explore issues of diversity such as race; class; gender; sexual orientation; ethnicity	21.5	59.1	22.3	55.4	28.6	57.1
The course provided opportunities to develop skills in expressing myself orally.	53.8	29.0	38.5	43.1	36.8	50.4
The course provided	30.1	62.4	32.3	63.1	30.8	66.2

opportunities to develop skills in expressing myself in writing.						
The course provided opportunities to explore ethical issues and dilemmas	28.0	64.5	26.2	64.6	35.3	57.9
It was clear how the work from the mentor session connected to the overall course.	37.6	55.9	36.2	45.4	39.8	54.1
I understand how this course fits into my PSU general education requirements	73.1	18.3	51.5	36.9	48.1	40.6
Overall, I was satisfied with my experience in this class.	NA	NA	36.2	50.0	33.1	49.6

**In courses with high agreement 75-100% of students agreed or strongly agreed with the statement. Moderate agreement represents 50-74% of students and low agreement indicates that less than half of students agreed with the statement.*

Percentage of SINQ courses where students agreed or strongly agreed that the faculty member...

	2006-2007 N=93		2007-2008 N=130		2008-2009 N=133	
	Moderate Agreement*	High Agreement*	Moderate Agreement*	High Agreement*	Moderate Agreement*	High Agreement*
Displayed a personal interest in students and their learning	23.7	72.0	33.1	58.5	29.3	61.7
Scheduled course work (class activities; tests; projects) in ways which	34.4	58.1	38.5	53.1	28.6	61.7

encouraged students to stay up to date in their work.						
Provided timely and frequent feedback on test; reports; projects; etc. to help students improve.	38.7	45.2	32.3	46.9	38.3	51.1
Used a variety of methods- papers; presentations; class projects; exams; etc.- to evaluate student progress.	26.9	65.6	32.3	53.1	34.6	58.6
Clearly stated the learning objectives for the overall course	31.8	60.5	33.8	55.4	29.3	58.6
Clearly stated the criteria for grading	38.0	46.5	36.9	43.1	30.8	54.1
Created an atmosphere that encouraged active student participation.	25.6	65.9	24.6	64.6	24.8	67.7
Used activities and assignments that allowed me to feel personally engaged in my learning.	37.2	54.3	36.9	51.5	36.8	50.4

FINDINGS

- In general, students agreed that they had the opportunities to address all four of the University Studies goals in their SINQ courses. Means on these items ranged from 3.93 to 4.13 on a 5-point agreement scale. Compared to 07-08, SINQ students in 08-09 had higher mean ratings on items related to teamwork and oral communication. When looking at the percentage of students that

agreed or strongly agreed with the 'goal' items, over two-thirds of students agreed or strongly agreed with each item.

- Students also generally agreed with statements about their faculty members' teaching practices. All items had means above 3.7 on a 5-point scale. Students were most likely to agree that faculty created an atmosphere that encouraged active participation ($M = 4.04$). Compared to 07-08, students in 08-09 were more likely to agree that faculty displayed a used a variety of methods to evaluate student progress and that faculty provided timely feedback on coursework.

REFLECTION

Based on the assessment results from 07 – 08 we made supporting faculty/mentor pairs to more intentionally integrate mentor sessions into the overall course structure one focus of our faculty and mentor development efforts for AY 08 - 09. The observed increase in students reporting that it was clear to them how the work from mentor sessions connected to the overall course suggests that these faculty development efforts were successful and should be continued for the coming year. For AY 09 – 10 faculty development efforts will focus incorporation of electronic portfolios of student work into selected SINQ courses.

UPPER-DIVISION CLUSTER ASSESSMENT

During AY 08 – 09 we used on on-line survey and a focus group study to assess students' experience of the Upper-division Cluster portion of the UNST curriculum. The purpose of these assessments was to gather data that could inform the University Studies Council's efforts to revise this section of the curriculum to improve the student experience and facilitate timely degree completion.

TOOLS AND METHODS

Student Experience of the Cluster Curriculum – On-line Survey

Purpose: The Student Experience of the Cluster Curriculum Survey asked students to report on their experiences choosing a cluster, selecting and enrolling for cluster courses, and taking cluster courses.

Method: During Spring term 2009, students enrolled in Capstone courses were sent an e-mail inviting them to complete an on-line survey. 1064 students were invited to take the survey and 147 students responded. After descriptive statistics were generated, differences between students who had completed SINQ and those who had not were explored.

Focus Groups

Objective: To better understand student perspectives of and experiences in Portland State University's Upper-division Cluster curriculum, qualitative data were collected using focus groups.

Method: This study used a layer of segmentation separating undergraduate students into two sets of focus groups: transfer students and more traditional students who started at PSU as freshman. The goal was to conduct four focus groups (two of transfer and two of traditional) with up to 10 students in each focus group. A graduate assistant, trained in qualitative data collection and analysis methods, was hired to recruit participants and moderate the focus groups. Participants were recruited from students enrolled in capstone courses during the winter 2009 term. Of the 1068 students who were sent an invitation to participate, approximately 68 responded within the allotted time and focus groups were assigned according to the days and times convenient for most of the students. Of the 68 who expressed interest in participating, 23 students participated in the four focus groups; 13 transfer students and 10 traditional students. Participants were from

four different colleges, College of Liberal Arts and Sciences, College of Urban and Public Affairs, School of Fine and Performing Arts, and School of Business Administration (See Appendix B for complete list and breakdown by focus group). Students were divided into one of four focus groups based on transfer or traditional student status and availability.

Each focus group was held in a classroom on campus and lasted roughly an hour and a half. The moderator began each focus group with a brief introduction and description about the purpose of the group both orally and through written word; consent was obtained from each participant. The moderator used a semi-structured focus group guide with a series of questions pertaining to students' experiences in and perceptions of the upper-division cluster curriculum. Students were also asked about the value of taking Cluster courses and whether they had any suggestions for how things might be improved. All focus group sessions were audio-recorded and the focus group data was transcribed from audiotapes verbatim. We used an inductive approach to analyze the data. An initial coding scheme based on the focus group questions and early review of the transcripts was developed. These initial codes captured the key analytic constructs of (1) student perceptions of the purpose/value of taking upper-division cluster courses, (2) student accounts of positive and negative experiences, (3) student experiences of finding and registering for cluster courses, and (4) student recommendations and suggestions for making the cluster curriculum more useful.

FINDINGS

On-line Survey

- 53% of students who completed the survey had transferred to PSU as juniors and began their UNST program with the Upper-division Cluster; 44% of respondents had completed at least one Sophomore Inquiry.
- The 5 most common clusters indicated by students on this survey accounted for 40% of the total responses:

<u>Top 5 Clusters</u>	<u>% of total responses</u>
Popular Culture	8.9
Family Studies	8.9
American Studies	7.4
Environmental Sustainability	7.4
Healthy People/ Healthy Places	7.4

- Students primarily found information about cluster courses through the PSU course scheduling web-site (55%) and just under half used the University Studies web-site (48%), the second most commonly used source of information. Students who took a SINQ course were much more likely to use the UNST web-site for information than students who had not taken a SINQ course. Relatively small numbers of respondents got their information on cluster courses from orientation (17%), IASC (12%), CLAS advisors (9%), SBA advisors (7%), and MCECS (0%).
- Only 27% of students reported no difficulty finding and scheduling their cluster courses. The most often reported problems were finding courses that fit the rest of the schedule, finding courses that matched a student's interests, and the challenge of having too few courses offered in a cluster during a term.

Difficulty finding and scheduling Cluster courses	% of total respondents
None	27.3
Finding courses that fit schedule	48.9

Knowing which courses count in cluster	19.4
Finding courses that match interests	42.4
Finding courses that do not overlap major	17.3
Too few courses in cluster	31.7

- Despite these difficulties, 61% of respondents agreed or strongly agreed that they were satisfied with their cluster course experience and 65% reported that the connections among cluster courses were clear.

Focus Groups

1. Student perceptions of the value and purpose of upper-division cluster curriculum

While many students felt that taking cluster courses was simply about meeting university requirements, most were also able to see some value or purpose for the cluster curriculum beyond meeting requirements. Most of the students felt that it offered them not only the opportunity to explore other disciplines, but also a chance to interact with students who may hold different worldviews. There were no apparent differences between native and transfer students in their perceptions of the value of the cluster curriculum.

I liked it because I'm just interested in a lot of different fields so it kind of gave me an excuse to take classes that I wanted to take. As much as I want to take a lot of the classes here if they don't count towards my major I'm not really motivated to sign up and do the work you know so I kind of like that I have to do it. I think a lot of universities are realizing the value of interdisciplinary and that a much more holistic education is more important than just graduating, not necessarily do this...not just do art or something, but actually get an education so I had a positive view on it.

I saw it as kind of cool that you could kind of do other things, because if you're in business that's all you ever do. University Studies and the cluster courses kind of help you see other things besides a narrow vision of that particular major that you're taking, kind of help you see other things outside of that.

2. Student accounts of positive and negative experiences in the cluster curriculum

There was no one common experience across the board for the students. Students reported a number of different experiences, both positive and negative, with the upper-division cluster curriculum. Some negative experiences mentioned by the students included scheduling issues due to too few classes offered, classes that were nothing like the description, faculty who did not seem to care about the course, disproportionately heavy workload, and classes that were not challenging enough. By far, the negative experience that held the most resonance with the students had to deal with workload issues. For some students, the workload was disproportionately heavy, making it hard to focus on their intended field of study.

For me, the content was what I expected but the level was a little bit more advanced than I thought it would be. I knew it was upper-division; this is a psychology class that I'm talking about, but I found that that class was actually my lowest grade that term and a lot of people in that class said it was very hard for them even as psychology majors. So that was something you don't really expect going into a class that's not even towards your major that you're going to have to focus more on that than anything else because it's not your field and yet you're expected to know everything.

Other students reported classes that were disappointing because they were not challenging enough or “dumb downed”. Students were frustrated by classes that fell below their academic expectations because they viewed them as being a waste of their time and money.

Well two of my classes ended up being film classes and we really didn't do any work, they were really interesting topics but I would have had more papers, I know...that's not something I normally advocate for...more work...but we just watched silly movies and didn't really reflect on them

Regardless of whether students felt overburdened by busy work or bored by a lack of work, a common theme that ran through all four focus groups was that there were inconsistent expectations across the different cluster courses. Students felt that this made it difficult to plan the rest of their academic schedule because they could not take into account how much work they should expect to do in each of the cluster courses.

The most positive experiences that students reported were making connections with students and faculty, classes that fit their expectations, classes that were challenging and interesting, taking classes outside their disciplines, and interacting with people with differing worldviews. While the students reported having a range of positive experiences, most agreed that taking a class outside their disciplines and meeting students with differing worldviews was one of the most positive aspects of the upper-division cluster curriculum.

It seems like sometimes when we choose a path when we're a freshman we end up having a lot of the same classes at least I did until the cluster course where I was able to take these random classes that I would never have taken or never would have learned about and the ones that I have taken have all helped me in my studies but also just as a student.

When I took Urban Planning, it's very outside my...I'm an accounting – business major so its people that are different than people I see everyday in my business major...like everyone in my major drives, everyone is like screw the environment. But you see these people, who just have this passion for urban planning and riding their bikes, sustainability, and this is cool...so it was really a great class, it opened my eyes to what Portland is all about.

I really liked the fact that nobody really knew that nobody really had a background in it so we were at the same level and all coming into it new but that was really enjoyable for me that we were all learning something new and we were all coming from different backgrounds so I tend to see the same people in my classes all the time after 4 years its like all the same faces so its nice to see new people.

Students expressed great satisfaction with being able to take classes outside their major. Most admitted that while they found these classes interesting, they would never have taken them had they not been required. In this way, many mentioned feeling grateful that they were “forced” to take courses outside their major.

3. Student experiences of finding and registering for cluster courses

Native and transfer differed slightly in their opinions about the process of finding and registering for cluster courses. Transfer students expressed more difficulty making sense of the process from which combinations of courses fulfilled university requirements to findings out which courses were being offered each term.

I felt like I didn't get a whole lot of advising about what cluster to choose. I transferred from PCC. I just started taking cluster courses, I took Astro-geology and Complexity in the Universe and I didn't understand that they were in different clusters.

I know that my roommate couldn't figure it out. I had to show her how to do it because I think it was confusing at first and then once we figured out that if you select all on the registration and...once you figure it out it was easy to know what was going on that term, but then there are other classes offered different terms so...

Traditional students tended to find the registration process straightforward. They took for granted their knowledge about the registration process and the process of the University Studies Program.

4. Students' suggestions for improvements to the cluster curriculum

Two themes emerged regarding students' suggestions for changes to the upper-division cluster curriculum: increased access to accurate information on the courses and greater flexibility in designing their cluster program. Students expressed that they wanted to have access to more information so that they could

make informed decisions about the classes they chose to take. Students not only wanted access to accurate information but they also wanted it to be convenient and easily accessible. Many students felt that information about the courses, including student evaluations and most current syllabus, should be made available to them, preferably on the internet. Students felt that with this information they could more appropriately plan for their junior year taking into account the workload from their chosen discipline.

...it comes back to the website, a more comprehensive website would be great. Just have a list of each cluster, classes that are offered each term and descriptions for those classes because I didn't know what I was getting into either.

I think also having access to a sample syllabus. I know that some departments do this and some departments don't and if that were more universal that would be really helpful. It may not be the exact same depending on like different teachers teaching and that kind of thing but that would be really helpful especially since some class titles are extremely vague. I signed up this term for a class called advanced topics in 20th century British literature, its like "what's an advanced topic?" and I really didn't know anything about what it was going to be like besides 20th century British literature until I got in there, having syllabi available to look at probably helpful.

I think besides having feedback from students, maybe if there were some way to maybe list who is teaching the class ahead of time so students can go ask them "hey, what's this class all about?" and besides that I think there needs to be another level of organization in saying these cluster courses are in the same cluster but this one is from this department so its going to have this focus...that might help too.

Students also mentioned the desire for flexibility in their cluster courses. Although flexibility meant different things to different students, the common underlying issue was that students felt constrained by the limited options available to them under the current system.

I would like it if it was take any 3 you want instead of it has to be in this category.

I think that cluster classes should be based off any sophomore inquiry not necessarily one that you've taken I know that its supposed to be a base but they're not really that related it doesn't seem necessary to have intro to African studies for African cluster....and I don't know anyone that came into PSU their freshman year saying I'm going to take this freshman inquiry and then I'm going to choose all my sophomore inquires and then I'm going to choose my clusters, its more do it as you go so by the time you get to the cluster its like oops I chose the wrong sophomore inquiry.

If it could be and this might defeat the purpose more open like instead of...because some of the clusters are really limiting, some of them have dozens of courses but some of them have like 3...its like you take these three courses and its like okay. But if it could just be more open, instead of having a women's studies cluster, maybe have a humanities cluster that has a couple hundred courses that you could take well okay so I can make myself a sequence so I'm not stuck with these three options this term just to give you more options because its so...I never took freshman or sophomore inquiry because I'm a transfer student but I feel like its really limiting. They give you a couple of different options each term but it could be like once you get to your Junior year it could be more open.

Maybe if they could make it flexible, whether you could choose if you could branch out in your education or take more of a specific focus in your interest area.

The junior cluster is organized that after you choose a cluster you have 3 classes in one cluster and it's hard to do that but if you had a choice maybe of 2 or 3 not just one maybe that would make things interesting.

While there was some talk about being able to "opt out" of the cluster curriculum, most students expressed the desire for more options within the cluster curriculum. They wanted larger clusters from which to choose, the option of choosing from several, or the ability to "build their own cluster". Students felt that

this would not only give them more control over their own education but also help mitigate some of the scheduling issues they encountered.

REFLECTION

The findings of the online survey and the focus groups suggest several avenues for possible revisions to the cluster curriculum that could improve the student experience and reduce impediments to timely completion of degrees:

1. Increase “flexibility” in students’ completion of their cluster courses by having more courses to choose from in each cluster. This would increase students’ choice of both course topics and available course times.
2. Improve the availability of accurate information on specific cluster courses to aid in students’ selecting courses that match their interests, abilities, and desired workload.
3. Improve outreach to transfer students to help them find information on the cluster curriculum (e.g., the UNST website).
4. Begin conversations of faculty expectations of students in cluster courses (in terms of their assumed prior knowledge in the subject area and the learning outcomes for the courses) to begin to address students’ perceptions of inconsistencies among cluster courses in their levels of difficulty.

CAPSTONE ASSESSMENT

Mid Quarter Formative Assessment: The SGID Process

Purpose: Small Group Inventory Diagnostics (SGID) are conducted in a sample of capstone courses each term. The purpose of the SGID is to provide capstone instructors with mid-term feedback and to gather comprehensive student feedback for the Capstone program as a whole. The SGID process is conducted in all of our new Capstone courses and in about 15-20% of our ongoing Capstone courses. During the 2008-09 academic year, these sessions were facilitated by Amy Spring (CAE and experienced Capstone Instructor), Janelle Voegelé (faculty development, CAE), and Celine Fitzmaurice (experienced Capstone Instructor.)

Method: The SGID is a 30 minute class visit which takes place mid-term. During the SGID, the instructor leaves the room and the SGID facilitator meets directly with students to solicit their responses to the following questions.

- What about this course is helping you to learn?
- What could be changed to improve this course?

Students write their responses and discuss this information with the facilitator. The facilitator combines these written responses into one document to be shared with the instructor and Capstone Program Director. The facilitator follows up with the instructor as needed to suggest strategies for continuous improvement of the course. At the end of the academic year, data from the SGID process is analyzed to identify trends in student feedback and suggest action steps based on the data collected. The following summary and recommendations are based on data collected during the 2008-09 academic year.

Summative End of Term Course Evaluations

Capstone Student Experience Survey: Quantitative

Purpose: The Capstone Student Experience Survey asked about students’ experiences in UNST Capstone courses as well as instructor pedagogical approaches and course topics. The survey results provide

information to individual faculty about their courses and to the program about the overall student experience in Capstones.

Method: Students enrolled in Capstone courses complete paper-based course evaluations in class at the end of their course. During the 2008-2009 academic year, 2315 students completed surveys.

Capstone Student Experience Survey: Qualitative

Purpose: Each year the Capstone Office analyzes students written comments from the end of term course evaluations in order to learn about the lived-experience our students have in Capstone courses. The data is collected to assist individual faculty in improving the teaching and learning in their courses and it allows us to document students' most important learnings as well as their suggestions.

Method: The Capstone Office created a data base which randomized all of the students' comments from 2008-09. 200 random comments were selected for analysis from the question regarding what were the students most important learnings and 200 random comments were selected representing students suggestions for improvements. As in previous years, two PSU researchers analyzed the comments separately according to the procedures outlined by Crewswell, 1994.

Capstone Course Portfolio Review

Purpose: Capstone course portfolios were developed as a method to assess student learning at the Senior Capstone level of the University Studies program. In the past, we have assessed common reflection assignments, course-specific reflection assignments and Capstone final products for evidence of student learning in Capstone courses. None of these approaches was able to capture and display the complexity of student learning in a community-based group-focused course. This year we developed course-based portfolios for Capstones which include syllabi, assignment instructions, examples of student work produced in the course, and faculty reflection.

Method: All Capstone instructors were invited to create course portfolios during Spring Term 2009. The group that was coordinating this project chose to focus on the University Studies diversity goal. Capstone instructors were offered a \$250 stipend to provide the materials needed for the portfolios as well as complete a reflection about how they incorporate diversity into their courses. Eighteen course portfolios were constructed for assessment. These represent 71 sections of Capstone during the 2008-2009 academic year, which enrolled 957 students (approximately 27% of the courses and students in the Capstone program during the school year).

To assess the course portfolios a group consisting of the Capstone Director, the Assessment Coordinator and a Capstone faculty member constructed a framework for evaluating diversity in these course portfolios. This framework included a list of the types of learning related to diversity that occur in Capstone courses and a scoring guide that included information on scoring portfolios as inadequate, adequate, or exemplary. On the portfolio review day, four Capstone faculty members reviewed the 18 portfolios, with each portfolio being scored twice. Inter-rater reliability was 80%.

ASSESSMENT DATA

Summative End of Term Course Evaluations

2008-2009 Capstone Course Evaluations

Capstone Learning Experience	05-06	06-07	07-08	08-09
The community work I did helped me to better understand the course	4.28		4.43	4.46

content in this Capstone.		4.39*		
I feel that the community work I did through this course benefited the community.	4.27	4.36*	4.42*	4.42
I felt a personal responsibility to meet the needs of the community partner of this course.	4.15	4.36*	4.40	4.39
I was already volunteering in the community before taking this course.	3.12	3.02	3.05	3.15*
I improved my ability to solve problems in this course	3.83	3.84	3.91*	3.95
My participation in this Capstone helped me to connect what I learned to real life situations.	4.14	4.33*	4.33	4.36
This course enhanced my communication skills (writing, public speaking, etc.).	3.96	4.00	4.00	4.02
This course helped me understand others who are different from me.	4.23	4.29*	4.29	4.26
This course enhanced my ability to work with others in a team.	4.07	4.09	4.12	4.15
This course explored issues of diversity (such as race, class, gender, sexual orientation).	4.13	4.26*	4.23	4.12*
In this course I improved my ability to analyze views from multiple viewpoints.	4.14	4.20	4.17	4.18
I will continue to volunteer or participate in the community after this course.	4.00	3.98	3.99	4.03
The syllabus clearly described how the course content connected to the community work.	4.05	4.26*	4.26	4.34*
I believe this course deepened my understanding of political issues.	3.92	3.81*	3.76	3.84*
I believe this course deepened my understanding of local social issues.	4.24	4.26	4.29	4.34
I now have a better understanding of how to make a difference in my community.	4.15	4.25*	4.19*	4.20
I had the opportunity to apply skills and knowledge gained from my major.	n/a	n/a	3.93	4.02*
I had the opportunity to engage with students from different fields of specialization	n/a	n/a	4.51	4.55

* The score is significantly different than the score for the previous year, $p < .05$

Capstone Instructor	05-06	06-07	07-08	08-09
Showed an personal interest in my learning	4.47	4.54	4.51	4.54
Scheduled work at an appropriate pace	4.35	4.33	4.38	4.43
Provide clear instructions for assignments	4.27	4.32	4.33	4.38
Created an atmosphere that encouraged active participation	4.58	4.60	4.59	4.62
Presented course material clearly	4.37	4.39	4.43	4.47
Created an atmosphere that helped me feel personally engaged in my learning	4.45	4.48	4.48	4.50
Provided helpful feedback	4.31	4.38	4.38	4.42
Related course material to real-life situations	4.51	4.56	4.55	4.59
Encouraged interaction outside of class	4.43	4.45	4.39	4.48
Provided clear grading criteria	4.21	4.22	4.27	4.34

Course design question: Within your Capstone, what forms of learning did the instructor use?	05-06	06-07	07-08	08-09
Reflective journals	76.0%	79.1%	75.7%	76%
Required class attendance	80.8%	80.6%	81.5%	81%
Collaborative projects	82.7%	82.4%	74.3%	83%
Readings on racial and ethnic issues	51.7%	59.4%	53.9%	55%
Extensive lecturing	20.7%	18.4%	17.3%	19%
Readings on women and gender issues	34.3%	40.8%	40.2%	41%
Group decision-making	82.0%	80.4%	78.6%	81%
Readings on civic responsibility	61.5%	67.8%	69.3%	74%
Student presentations	72.6%	71.4%	73.4%	76%
Discussions on political issues	52.7%	55.3%	51.8%	56%
Discussions on social issues	77.7%	83%	83.45%	87%
Class discussions	89.5%	88.1%	79.2%	95%
Exams	3.8%	3.0%	4.1%	5%
Final exam	3.9%	2.6%	n/a	5%
WebCt or blackboard	31.4%	42.2%	58.5%	49%
Portfolio	20.0%	19.5%	16.4%	18%
Discussions on ethical issues	40.4%	58.2%	n/a	n/a

Capstone Course Portfolio Review

Portfolio Rating	Number of Portfolio
Inadequate (the portfolio did not show that the course provided students with clear opportunities to demonstrate their learning related to diversity)	3
Adequate (the portfolio showed that the course provided opportunities for students to demonstrate their learning related to diversity)	11
Exemplary (the course syllabi, assignments, and activities consistently and clearly provided opportunities for students to demonstrate learning related to diversity. This course is an example for others)	4

Types of Learning represented in course portfolios	Number of Portfolios
Reflect on their personal experiences interacting with diverse populations (e.g. mentoring, tutoring, interaction with senior citizens, oral histories) <u>or indirectly serving and learning from a diverse population</u> (e.g. grant writing for Camp Starlight which serves kids infected and affected by HIV and AIDS, creating marketing plans for international women's cooperatives)	9
Analyze new insights developed as a result of working with and/or learning about diverse populations (this may include addressing previously held stereotypes, new sensitivities, new awareness of self and others, new	10

relationships).	
Document new insights about the root causes of specific social issues and how social and environmental issues impact specific populations	11
Write reflections on how they come to understand their own <u>values</u> and self identity on a personal level and how these values and identities shape their relationships with “others”	10
Demonstrate an understanding and valuing of multiple perspectives	13

ASSESSMENT FINDINGS:

Mid Quarter Formative Assessment: The SGID Process

What about this course is helping you to learn? The following themes emerged in response to this question:

- Instructor Expertise (facilitation skills, knowledge of the course topic, enthusiasm, and active participation)
- Service Work (opportunity to work with community organizations and engage in hands-on learning, opportunity to interact with new populations, appreciation for relationship building as a tool for learning, appreciation for linking academics with real world experiences)
- Course Structure (appreciation for the range of course activities including guest speakers, small class size, community-based learning, readings, reflective writing, and classroom activities in a flexible course design)
- Class Discussions (opportunities for open dialogue with other students in a setting that encourages students to express their own ideas and learn from each other).

What could be changed to improve this course? The following themes emerged in response to this question:

- Final Project Concerns (desire for clearer guidelines, pacing, and ongoing feedback related to the final project)
- Course Readings Concerns (students felt over or underwhelmed by course readings load; in some cases the readings felt too academic for non-majors; readings did not always link to community work)
- Assignment Guidelines (desire for clearer guidelines, samples to base their work upon, and better pacing of capstone writing assignments)

Capstone Student Experience Questionnaire: Quantitative

- When compared with data from previous years, Capstone students continue to agree that their courses emphasize the university studies goals and help them become aware of and committed to community issues.

- Specifically when compared to data from the 07-08 academic year, students in 08-09 were more likely to agree that the syllabus clearly described the community service contribution of the course and deepened their understanding of political issues. Students in 08-09 had a slightly lower rating on the item that asked whether they had addressed issues of diversity in their course.
- Students also reported on pedagogical techniques used and course topics covered in capstone. With few exceptions, the percentage of students reporting the use of particular techniques remained stable or increased. There was a decrease in the use of electronic communication tools.

Capstone Student Experience Survey: Qualitative

Researchers confirmed that 7 most common “**important learnings**” for students were:

1. Appreciation of diversity (including learnings and insights about new populations, communities, ethnicities, and cultures) 63 comments
2. Connecting academic learning to “real life” (real issues, people, organizations projects, publics, deadlines) 33 comments
3. Communication skills (including collaboration, working in groups, class discussions, presenting, writing for a real audience) 33
4. Insights gained from instructor (facilitation, mentoring, creating “safe space”, creating collaborative learning environment) 25
5. Greater Awareness of Social Issues (including political issues, issue of on profit work...) 23
6. Tangible Skills (grant writing, marketing, archiving, public relations, sometimes referred to as “professional skills”) 18
7. Self Efficacy (importance of making a difference, felt that they did make a difference) 15

(Note totals equal 210 because within one student comment could have 2 different themes present).

Researches confirmed that the 6 most frequent themes from the survey seeking **suggestions for improvement** were:

- 1) No suggestions (including: no, none, N/A, compliments for the course “good as it is”...) 65 comments
- 2) Issues related to course design (desire for mandatory attendance so that all group members would be present each week, more feedback from faculty on final product along the way, clearer grading criteria). 45 comments
- 3) Issues related to scheduling (scheduling of service work, too much time, too much work, pacing of work). 32 comments
- 4) Specific suggestions regarding the work at the community partner site (feedback, supervision, how to improve) 18
- 5) PRAISE for the instructor (instead of suggestions it was more praise for the instruction in the class). 6
- 6) Misc comments (including comments about UNST in general, titling of the courses...) 34

Capstone Course Portfolios

- The course portfolios demonstrated that by and large students are given opportunities to engage in and demonstrate learning related to diversity. Fifteen out of 18 courses were assessed as adequately meeting expectations for addressing diversity or as exemplary courses, incorporating many aspects of diversity throughout the course.
- For courses that were judged to be exemplary, the syllabus clearly stated diversity as a goal and then showed that it was woven throughout the course. Students were able to demonstrate multiple types of learning related to diversity. The faculty reflection clearly discussed how the examples of assignment instructions and student work samples supported student learning related to diversity.
- For courses that were assessed as inadequate, the materials compiled in the portfolio did not reflect the type of learning opportunities listed above. Diversity may have been addressed in the course, but that wasn't evident in the portfolio. These courses tended to provide opportunities for only one type of learning related to diversity and did not clearly state diversity as a learning goal in the syllabus or provide specific assignment instructions related to diversity. We want to emphasize that while Capstone courses should incorporate all four UNST goals, it is difficult to focus on all of the goals equally in one course. The courses that did not provide adequate learning opportunities related to diversity likely focus more heavily on other UNST goals.
- The University Studies definition of diversity does not include age, which was problematic when assessing courses that dealt specifically with the elderly or with youth.

REFLECTION

Mid Quarter SGID

Summary: These results show that students are learning in engaged ways that are important and meaningful to them. Students appreciate the quality of instruction, value their volunteer opportunities, are grateful for flexible course design and welcome the provided space to express and share ideas with their peers. The results also inform that students desire more time and stronger connections with community partners both in and outside of the classroom. Improvement for the course falls primarily within the context of course design, assignments, and final product guidelines.

Recommendations for 2009-10

Capstone courses are very complex due to their interdisciplinary nature, their collaborative nature and the marriage of community and classroom work that distinguishes them. A successful capstone course requires a well-designed syllabus and course schedule, a skilled facilitator to shepherd students through the service-learning experience, and a strong relationship with their community partner. The SGID data for 2008-09 suggests some opportunities for capstone faculty development. The following are some concrete recommendations for improvement of the PSU's Capstone Program:

- Hire/retain capstone instructors who are knowledgeable in the content area, have established ties in the community, and possess strong facilitation skills
- Increase the number of faculty development efforts focused on course design. Continue to provide one-on-one support to new instructors in this area. Offer ongoing workshops for all faculty

interested in improving upon their course design, grading criteria, and pacing of course material.

- Design/host a faculty development workshop focused on capstone course readings (focus on reading loads, readings which bridge community and classroom learning, connecting readings to reflective writing assignments, readings which are accessible to students of diverse majors)
- Encourage increased involvement of community in capstone courses. This could take the form of guest speakers, field trips, or increased service-learning hours.
- Begin to compile a body of “Best Practices” for capstone courses. All instructors should be encouraged to share their best practices on an ongoing basis. These samples should be accessible to all capstone faculty via a web interface. In particular, the program would benefit from best practices in the following areas:
 - Sample syllabi (to highlight effective course learning goals for s-l courses)
 - Sample course calendars (to highlight pacing of assignments, and balance of community and classroom learning)
 - Sample reflective writing assignments
 - Guidelines for final projects and the team formation process
 - Sample classroom activities

Capstone Student Experience Survey: Quantitative

The Capstone Office is pleased to see that the Capstone evaluations this year remained relatively stable in the midst of some staffing changes. The Capstone Program Director worked intentionally with colleagues in the Center for Academic Excellence to provide ongoing support to our newer faculty. One experienced Capstone faculty worked directly with a handful of faculty whose courses had low scores in previous year in order to help enhance the quality of the student learning experience. Through our rigorous Capstone review process and faculty development efforts including a standardized 1:1 Capstone faculty orientation done by CAE we are able to maintain quality even as we develop new course offerings to meet the interests of our students, faculty, and community partners. Two years ago UNST initiated a partnership with CAE to give faculty more support in developing effective syllabi. That syllabi support appears to be working well as evidenced by the increased scores in that area. We are encouraged by the scores on that item and hope to continue the trend of positive ratings for the Capstone syllabi.

This was the second year that the Capstone course evaluation asked students if they had the opportunity to apply skills and knowledge gained from my major and if they had the opportunity to collaborate with other disciplines. Scores above 4.0 show early indications that students are in agreement that these goals are being reached. The Capstone Office will continue to work with departments interested in discipline-based Capstones which will allow students to more intentionally apply expertise from their major while hopefully maintaining high scores related to the University Studies goals.

Finally, the Capstone office has initiated a partnership with the PSU Office of Diversity and Equity. We plan to have about 12 faculty who currently teach Capstones with low scores on the diversity item work with the Diversity and Equity Office this year. The plan is to have their staff work 1:1 with these Capstone faculty and actually go into Capstone courses to model exemplar activities, exercises, and reflection to reinforce this goal (which slipped just slightly in terms of scores this year).

Capstone Student Experience Survey: Qualitative

Students continue to report that the most important learnings in the Capstone are the realization of the University Studies goals. Students explicitly mentioned diversity as the most important learning in the

Capstone program as they reported building relationships with new communities. They remarked on their growth in communicating effectively orally, in groups, and in writing. Students described social responsibility as they discussed learning about community issues and their self efficacy in addressing those issues. In addition students reported deep learning from the Capstone instructors themselves. They commented on faculty member's facilitation skills, their willingness to engage with students and their ability to create safe spaces for learning!

The largest theme found in the call for suggestions was actually "no suggestions for improvements" from about 1/3 of the respondents. The greatest concern for students were very specific course suggestions for improvement which included ideas for scheduling, attendance policies, feedback loops, and greater clarity in grading. Each faculty member receives these suggestions and staff members from either CAE or UNST follow up with each faculty member whose course evaluations contain these student suggestions. These seem to be handled best on a case by case basis, but we will also offer workshops in the coming year to share best practices around course design as suggested in the SGID assessment section of this report.

Capstone Course Portfolios

Diversity Learning in Capstone Courses

As we have engaged in this process, we have learned a great deal about how students learn about diversity in Capstone courses. The conversation among the reviewers following the portfolio review process revealed a number of issues for further consideration. The findings and observations can help shape the way diversity is approached in Capstones. The best courses included content about diversity AND opportunities for students to make sense of new populations and perspectives for themselves. We found examples where course content seemed to be very related to diversity, but assignments did not encourage students to reflect about diversity. In other courses, diversity was not the primary content of the course, but there were very well-developed assignments that brought the topics in and encouraged reflection and processing. There seem to be opportunities here for improvement in assignment design and syllabus construction.

A second area that came up as we reviewed the courses is that there was a clear distinction between courses where students are interacting directly with the target population of the course (e.g., tutoring, interviewing, assisting) and courses that provide indirect service to a population (e.g., grantwriting, website building, marketing). In cases where students were not interacting directly with a target population, there was a sense among reviewers that there needed to be more effort to include content about the population. Based on this assessment, direct vs. indirect service seems to be an important distinction related to diversity and could be a fruitful topic for future faculty development efforts.

Finally, we noted that the University Studies definition of diversity as it currently stands leaves out some identity groups including age. In order to truly reflect the diverse populations that the Capstone program serves, this definition may need to be revisited.

Course Portfolio Assessment Process

Because this was the first year that we assembled and assessed Capstone course portfolios, we were interested in understanding how the process worked and how to improve it. Generally, the faculty who participated in the review of the portfolios felt that the portfolios provided enough information to make a determination about student learning in the Capstone courses. However, there were a few suggestions for improvement. First, they noted the importance of the faculty reflection for helping understand student learning in the course. To make the reflections even stronger, they suggested clearer instructions for the faculty so that they directly addressed the evidence they were providing about diversity in their courses and how it contributed to student learning. For example, it was not always clear why a particular assignment had been included if the faculty did not explain that in their reflection. The reviewers wanted the faculty reflection to create clear links among the syllabi, the assignment instructions and the student work that was provided in the portfolio. A second area that the faculty reviewers wanted to emphasize was the importance of the student work samples as direct evidence of student learning. They felt this

should be communicated clearly to faculty who are creating portfolios and should be emphasized in the portfolio review process.

This year the scoring process was designed so that each portfolio was given one holistic rating. The faculty reviewers suggested that the program would gather better information by having reviewers rate the portfolios separately for the syllabus, the assignment instructions, the faculty reflection, and the student work samples. In this way, it would be possible to determine whether there is alignment between syllabus, assignments, and work samples.

University Studies Summary of Retention Initiatives for 2008-09

Introduction

As Portland State University and University Studies focus more attention on student persistence and retention, the University Studies has sought to address issues identified through our assessment efforts, while paying attention to the needs of groups of students we find underserved. The UNST assessment findings suggest that students' concerns about their ability to succeed in college can be grouped in three groups:

- Academic preparedness
- Connectedness
- Financial and overall well-being

The retention initiatives and projects started in the 2008-09 academic year were informed by these findings and are the basis of our student success framework. Our strategy for action involved addressing the three major groups of students' concerns while focusing on the following:

- Building resources and capacity to help students succeed
- Early identification of students at risk
- Ongoing communication with all students
- Quick intervention when needed

Retention Initiatives

Building Resources and Capacity to Help Students Succeed:

- Freshman Year Experience Map Charette
 - A design session aimed to create a map which would reflect freshman year experiences of our students.
 - Collaborative effort between University Studies and ten Student Affairs departments and the Office of Financial Aid.
 - The results of the session will be used in the future to inform communication and intervention efforts with students.
- Communication system/e-mail response management system/retention system
 - University Studies /Student Affairs work group.
 - Reviewed a number of customer relationship management products aimed to improve communication, targeted intervention and student retention.
 - Identified products that best match our needs with the plan to obtain the chosen product during the next academic year.
- Student success website

- In the process of building an online learning and resource system for PSU students, mentors, faculty and staff.
 - Will allow for greater interaction between students, mentors and faculty, and a better student connection to resources and opportunities on campus.
- Developed an attrition survey
 - The goal of the survey was to obtain information on why students leave.
 - Tested in five FRINQ pilot classes.
 - Can be used to assess student attrition in FRINQ and broader.

Early Identification of Students at Risk:

- Developed a pilot program in five FRINQ classes. The program involves a close collaboration between University Studies and the Student Affairs division. The components of the program are:
 - CP Note – an early identification and intervention system. The CP note is an online form designed to allow faculty to have a systematic means to communicate with students and address a variety of concerns. The system will generate an e-mail to a student and enable instructor to refer and connect students to appropriate services, as well as to give feedback to students about their progress in the course.
 - Additional classroom activities (fall term: introducing advising and career counseling to students; winter term: learning styles (UASC); spring term: connecting students' interest with their majors (Career Center).
 - Reflective assignment at the end of year
 - Questionnaire in the End-Of-Year survey specific to the activities done in the program
 - The lessons learned from the pilot program will be put forward as recommendations for use in other FRINQ classes.
 - The intention is to create an integrated network of academic, social and financial support for students.
- Fall to winter identification of at-risk students and intervention/referral to appropriate services
 - A collaborative effort between University Studies and Student Affairs.

Ongoing Communication With All Students:

- Created a bi-weekly communication plan with FRINQ students based on the academic calendar and the issues students need addressed during their first year in college.
 - Sent bi-weekly e-mails to all FRINQ students as part of the ongoing communication efforts.
 - Planning to continue bi-weekly e-mail communication in the 2009-10 academic year
- Online chat (once a term)
 - Planned as an alternative way of communication and support for students.
 - Plan to discontinue this activity due to the lack of students' interest. In addition, other units on campus, such as UASC offer regular online chat sessions.
- UNST Advising Day (fall, winter)
 - Goal to bring services to students, takes place in front of the FRINQ classrooms
 - Collaboration with advisers from UASC and CLAS pre-professional programs, and Career Center counselors.
 - The advisers saw about 90 students fall term and about 60 students winter term over a four-hour period.

- Planning to continue this activity next year
 - Based on students' feedback we are planning to increase the duration of the event in fall term to two days.
- Major Exploration Day (spring term)
 - The goal of the event was to connect students with academic departments.
 - A collaborative campus-wide event involving each PSU college and school, the Undergraduate Advising & Support Center and the Career Center.
 - The event was attended by more than 400 students.
 - Planning to continue the event in the future.

Quick Intervention When Needed:

- See FRINQ pilot program above
- Fall to winter identification of at-risk students and intervention/referral to appropriate services
 - A collaborative effort between University Studies and Student Affairs.

Conclusion

In an effort to continue building a campus culture centered on student success and retention, the University Studies intends to build on the retention initiatives started in 2008-09 academic year. As noted above, we are planning to continue and expand where appropriate most of the projects with the goal to help students create meaningful connections to faculty, staff, other students and resources on campus and develop an essential set of skills necessary for students to be successful.